

# SOURCES OF THE SIRAT

BEING A CRITICAL ACCOUNT OF  
THE SOURCES OF OUR KNOW-  
LEDGE OF THE LIFE OF THE HOLY  
PROPHET AND OF THE EARLY  
HISTORY OF ISLAM

خطیب از مکرم چوبہ دری مشتاق احمد  
با جوہر حوم بزر یعنی مکرم نزیر احمد صاحب

by

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TALIF-O-ISHA'AT, QADIAN

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## FOREWORD

I am grateful to my friend Qazi Muhammad Aslam, M.A., Lecturer, Government College, Lahore, for translating into English this, the first chapter of my *Sirat Khatam al-Nabiyyin*, which the Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya, Qadian, published some years ago. The *Sirat* which still awaits completion (being at present in two volumes which trace the life-story of the Holy Prophet of Islam upto the 5th year of the Hijra) is in Urdu, but an English translation of it seemed desirable for English-knowing readers. The first chapter discusses the Sources of the Life of the Holy Prophet and of the early History of Islam, and is being reproduced here for its basic interest and importance. The translation, which has been finally revised by me,

has been gone through by M. Muhammad Shafi, M.A., Principal, Oriental College, Lahore, who has very kindly made some valuable suggestions.

The reader will note that the dates in this work are in accordance with the Muslim era. But these may be easily converted into the Christian era. One need only remember that the Holy Prophet was born in the year 570 A.D., that he died in the year 632 A.D., and that his flight from Mecca to Medina, which marks the beginning of the Muslim era, took place in the year 622 A.D. Thus by adding any given year of the Hijra to 622 and subtracting 11 days per year owing to the difference in the two systems the reader will obtain the approximate corresponding dates of the Christian era. This rough method, however, may not be used for any exact chronological research.

As regards the transliteration of Arabic

names and titles, I have, for convenience, followed the system adopted by the present European authors, departing from it, however, in case of important words whose transliteration, already sanctioned by wide Muslim usage, must be retained.

If this account of the sources of the Life of the Holy Prophet succeeds in enlightening the path of a single research student, the writer will consider his labours amply rewarded.

QADIAN:  
AUGUST, 1938.

M. B. A.

## كتاب في تاريخ الحضارة الإسلامية

THE birth and rise of Islam took place at a time, when the greater part of the world still lived under primitive conditions. Communication between one country and another was slow and difficult, the printing press had yet to be invented, and even the art of writing was in its infancy. A few countries did possess these elementary arts, but Arabia was not one of them. Arabia was on the whole illiterate. Its condition was indeed very peculiar. Externally, it was cut off from the rest of the world. Internally it was without any social, political, or intellectual movement which might have raised it in the scale of culture and national consciousness.

Learning, where it did exist, amounted only to literacy. Beyond, therefore, a few relics and inscriptions belonging to those times, we have no records of Arabia before the rise of Islam, and it is obvious that such records cannot provide the basis of a history. Records of the empires and kingdoms which flourished on the borders of Arabia—the empires of Rome and Persia—refer occasionally to Arabia. But, as one would expect, these references are very slender, and yield only very trifling details, from which no idea can be had of the conditions of the country as a whole. The same may be said of the Biblical records and the books of the Old Testament which contain occasional references to Arabia.

#### PRE-ISLAMIC TRADITIONS AND POETRY

OUR main source of pre-Islamic Arabian history is to be found in Arabia's own historical traditions. As already stated

the Arabs were not used to writing. Still, they were able to conserve the floating traditions of their country, and these passed intact from one generation to another, thanks to the wonderful memory possessed by the Arabs.<sup>1</sup> Every tribe had its members who carried in their heads the history not only of their own tribe, but the history also of many neighbouring tribes. Arabian genealogy (علم الانساب i.e., *'Ilm al-Ansab*) has had many votaries distinguished in pre-Islamic Arabia, and to them we owe whatever knowledge we have of the tribal history of the country before the advent of Islam.

In pre-Islamic poetry also, we have sources of early tribal history. The art of poetry had attained to a high level of development before Islam, in some respects even higher than that of Islamic poetry. Every tribe had its poet who depicted in

1. Sir William Muir, *Life of Mohammad* (1923 edition), Introduction p. 16.

powerful *bedawin* verse, the achievements of his tribe. These verses were regularly recited at their meetings.<sup>1</sup> Of pre-Islamic poets : (1) Imra al-Qais, (2) Nabigha Dhu-byani, (3) Zuhair, (4) Tarafa, (5) 'Antra, (6) 'Alqama, (7) 'Asha, (8) 'Amr b. Kulthum, (9) Ḥarith b. Hilliza, (10) Omayya b. Abi Ṣalt, (11) K'ab b. Zuhair, (12) Labid, (13) Ḥassan b. Thabit, and (14) Khansa are particularly well-known. Much of their poetry has been preserved, and the powerful reading which it makes is, in a sense, without a parallel in the poetry of any other people or country. The last four of these poets—of whom the very last was a poetess of good repute—entered Islam in the time of the Holy Prophet himself.<sup>2</sup>

Many would perhaps wonder and ask, how centuries of history of a great country can at all be preserved in its oral

traditions? But we should remember that at that time the historical culture of most peoples was confined only to oral traditions of this kind. The difference between these and Arabian traditions was that while the former were carried in their heads by all and sundry, and were eventually collected as they were found, the latter were carefully preserved in verse and oral tradition, in the wonderful memory of the Arabs. In any case, the oral traditions of the Arabs, which were later committed to writing, constitute our great source of pre-Islamic Arabian history. But for them, we should know nearly nothing of this history. It is impossible to ignore them.

These pre-Islamic traditions are recorded in several books, but their completest record is contained in the work of the famous Muslim historian Abu Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabari.<sup>1</sup> Ṭabari

1. Muir, *op cit.* Introduction p. 52.

2. *Kitab al-Sh'ir wal-Shu'ara*, by Ibn Qutaiba.

1. Born 224, died 310 A.H.

collected the greater part of these traditions and gave them a systematic form. To him most of the later historians turn for material. I will have more to say about him later on.

With the advent of Islam there opened up a new chapter of Arabian history. The Holy Prophet (born 570 A.D., died 632 A.D.) made his advent to the dreamy people of Arabia, and then, as a man dead asleep wakes up to a loud and sudden sound, Arabia woke up to his message. That message made history for Arabia. It put an unknown desert on the map of the world. It was as though something, which had long been enwrapped in the dark, was suddenly turned to the fullest light of the sun. For the life of the Holy Prophet and for the early history of Islam we have material which is as extensive as it is reliable. No religious founder ever left behind him such material as did the Holy Prophet, to enable coming generations

to reconstruct his life-history. This material is to be found in several forms, and to an account of these forms I now turn.

### THE HOLY QURAN

FIRST and foremost is the Holy Quran. According to Muslim belief, the Holy Quran was, to a letter, revealed by God to the Holy Prophet. The revelation of it was spread over all the twenty-three years of the Prophetic ministry which began with a revelation, and closed with a revelation. If the verses of the Holy Quran are distributed over the whole of the Prophet's ministry, the mean quantum of revelation per day turns out to be something less than a verse or 10 words on an average. The ministry lasted for about 7,970 days and the number of verses in the Holy Quran is only 6,236 and the number of words is 77,934.<sup>1</sup> From this it appears that

1. *Kitab al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Quran*, by Suyuṭī, Vol. 1, pp. 66 and 72.

the Holy Quran was revealed at a very slow pace, and even admitting that breaks in revelation on some days were made up by longer revelations on other days, the quantity of Quranic revelation, on any single day, was never so long as to make its commission to writing or to memory at all a difficult task.

The Holy Prophet used to dictate the verses as they were revealed and, under divine guidance, he used also to prescribe the places in which they were to be recorded. There are a number of reliable traditions supporting this view. According to one, attributed to 'Abdullah b. 'Abbas, the Holy Prophet's cousin, 'Uthman, the third Khalifa (and one of the scribes who wrote down the Quranic revelation in the Prophet's lifetime) used to say that when a number of verses were revealed together, the Holy Prophet would summon one of the scribes and dictate to him the verses revealed, assigning to each its *Sura*

(chapter) and its place in the *Sura*. If only one verse was revealed, even then a scribe was sent for, the verse dictated and its place assigned.<sup>1</sup>

The scribes of the Holy Prophet are well-known in Islamic history, their names and their lives being on definite record. The best known among them were Abu Bakr, 'Omar, 'Uthman, 'Ali, Zubair b. al-'Awwam, Obayi b. Ka'b, 'Abdullah b. Rawaha, and Zaid b. Thabit—all devoted companions of the Holy Prophet most of whom accepted Islam in the very beginning.<sup>2</sup> It is evident from this list that from the very beginning of divine revelation the Holy Prophet had a reliable and trustworthy company of scribes to take revelation down as it came. The Holy Quran was thus committed to writing as it was revealed, and with the writing down of it

1. *Tirmidhi* chapter on *Tafsir al-Quran*.

2. *Fath al-Bari*, Vol. IX, p. 19; and *Zurqani*, Vol. III, pp. 311—326.

naturally grew the present order of its verses, which order divine design had conceived differently from their chronological order. The death of the Holy Prophet marked the completion of the revelation of the Holy Quran. Accordingly, Abu Bakr, the first Khalifa, in consultation with 'Omar, ordered Zaid b. Thabit, one of the scribes, to collect together the different portions of the text, and secure it in the form of a book. Zaid b. Thabit, who was a hard-working and a very intelligent young man, applied himself with great industry, and guided by the strictest oral and documentary evidence, for every single verse, prepared a complete copy of the Holy Quran in the form of a book. This authoritative copy was later placed in the safe custody of one of the wives of the Holy Prophet—Hafṣa daughter of 'Omar.<sup>1</sup> When Islam spread to different countries,

1. *Bukhari*, *Kitab Faqail al-Quran*, Chapter, 'The Collection of the Quran.'

'Uthman, the third Khalifa, ordered the preparation of accurate copies of the text collected by Zaid, and then had them issued to all parts of the Muslim Empire.<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Quran was also committed to memory as it was revealed, and wonderful arrangements existed to this end. A number among the Companions of the Holy Prophet memorised the text in the order in which the Holy Prophet dictated it and which the Holy Quran was ultimately to have, and while the number of those, who had learnt up small portions of the text, was very much larger, the number of those, who had learnt up the whole of the Quran during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, was also pretty large. Four of them were certified by the Holy Prophet himself and, having been found satisfactory in every way, they were appointed by him to teach

1. *Bukhari*, *Kitab Faqail al-Quran*, Chapter, 'The Collection of the Quran'; Also *Fath al-Bari*, Vol. 9, pp. 17 and 18.

the Holy Quran to other companions.<sup>1</sup>

At the death of the Holy Prophet when the Holy Quran was gathered as a book, the number of those who knew the whole of it by heart, mounted very rapidly. During the reign of 'Omar, the second Khalifa, a Muslim army in a single cantonment included no less than 300 *Huffaz* i.e., men who could recite the whole of the Holy Quran from memory.<sup>2</sup> These arrangements, designed and determined by God, secured the Holy Quran against all possible interpolation and interference. Subsequently so many accurate copies became available in all countries, and so large became the number of those who knew the Holy Book by heart, that the possibility of interpolation was completely eliminated. And to-day, as admitted by

1. *Bukhari*, *Kitab Faqail al-Quran*, Chapter, 'The Reciters of the Quran.'

2. *Kanz al-Ummal*, Chapter on the Quran, Section: *Faqail al-Quran*.

friend and foe alike, there is not the least doubt that the Quran which we possess is the very Quran which was revealed to the Holy Prophet. It is the same text, and has the same order which the Holy Prophet, under divine guidance, prescribed for it. I quote some European Christian writers in support.

Says Sir William Muir :—

"There is probably in the world no other work which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text."

Again :—

"To compare their pure text with the various readings of our Scriptures is to compare things between which there is no analogy."

Again :—

"There is every security, internal and external, that we possess the text which Mohammad himself gave forth and used."

Yet again :—

"We may upon the strongest assumption affirm that every verse in the Koran,<sup>1</sup> is

1. The same as Quran. While quoting I have retained the form used by the authority quoted.

the genuine and unaltered composition of Mohammad himself."<sup>1</sup>

Similarly Noeldeke, the great German Orientalist, says :—

"The Koran of 'Uthman contains none but genuine elements."

Again :—

"All efforts of European scholars to prove the existence of later interpolations in the Koran have failed."<sup>2</sup>

The value of the Holy Quran as an historical document does not merely lie in the fact that it has been protected since the time of its revelation. It also lies in the fact that having been revealed gradually during the twenty-three years of the Holy Prophet's ministry, it is a contemporary record of his life. There is not a period of his life which is not illumined by some part or another of the text of the Holy Book. This is the deeper significance of what Hazrat 'Aisha (the Holy Prophet's consort)

1. Sir William Muir *op cit*, Introduction, pp. 22, 23, 27, 28.  
2. *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th edition, Article on Koran.

said of him, *viz.* :

"Verily his character is the Quran."<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Quran in a way is a record of the daily round of activities, the moral qualities and all the little ways of the Prophet. No other historical person possesses such an authentic, and such a powerful contemporary record of his life. There have indeed been those—and there are some even to-day—whose 'lives' have been written and published in their lifetime or soon after. But the distinction which the Holy Prophet possesses in the Quran, as a day-to-day record of his life, is possessed by no one else.<sup>2</sup> Western writers have openly acknowledged this fact.

Says Sir William Muir :—

"The importance of this deduction can

1. *Musnad Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal*, Vol. 6, p. 91.

2. The fact that the Holy Quran is not recorded or read in its chronological order does not destroy its value as an historical document. For, we know the order in which the different parts of it were revealed and can study it in its chronological as well as in its present order.

hardly be over-estimated. The Koran becomes the ground-work and the test of all inquiries into the origin of Islam, and the character of its Founder. Here we have a storehouse of Mohammad's own words recorded during his life extending over the whole course of his public career, and illustrating his religious views, his public acts and his domestic character. By this standard of his own making, we may safely judge his life and actions, for it must represent either what he actually thought or what he affected to think. And so true a mirror is the Koran of Mohammad's character, that the saying became proverbial among the early Muslims, *His character is the Koran.*<sup>1</sup>

Professor Nicholson, the well-known Orientalist of England, writes in his *Literary History of the Arabs* :—

"Here we have materials of unique and incontestable authority for tracing the origin and early development of Islam—such materials as do not exist in the case of Buddhism or Christianity or any other ancient religion."<sup>2</sup>

1. Sir William Muir, *op cit.* Introduction, p. 28.

2. *Literary History of the Arabs*, p. 143.

In short, the Holy Quran, as an authentic historical record, is unsurpassed by any other record pertaining to any other person in the world. Its contemporaneous character is unquestioned, which not even its detractors dare deny.

#### EARLY ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

NEXT to the Quran, are those traditions which whether theological, exegetical or historical have been transmitted by the *Šahaba* (صحاب), i.e., Companions of the Prophet to their Successors, i.e., the *Tabi'in* (تابعین) and by the Successors to their successors, i.e., the *Taba' Tabi'in* (تابع تابعین) and by them to others and so on until those traditions were committed to writing and protected for all time. The historical value of these traditions compared with the historical value of similar records of other peoples is very great indeed. The Prophet's Companions stimulated by an extraordinary love and affection for their Master, were

always on the look out for anything the Prophet ever said or did. What they observed, they recorded—sometimes in black and white—in admirable word pictures unequalled by any other traditional record of this kind. The *Hadith*—as the Muslim traditions are collectively known in Islamic terminology—provides an amazing reading to this day. One cannot but wonder at the meticulous care and thoroughness with which those unlettered sons of the desert preserved everything, great or small, which the Holy Prophet said or did. They afford us to-day knowledge of the minutest details of the Prophet's life and character. They tell us how the Prophet fulfilled his obligations towards God and man, how he heard the voice of God, and how he communicated it to others; how he prayed and how he fasted. They tell us how he conducted himself in peace and war, how he dealt with friend and foe, and how he treated those who were near and dear to

him, or those who were strangers to him. We have in the traditions descriptions of his domestic life, of his relations with his wives and children, of how he conducted himself at home, and outside; how he would laugh and how weep; how he would walk and how stand up; how he would sit and how rise from his seat; how he would eat and drink; how he would work and how rest; how he would sleep and how get up. The traditions contain the minutest details of all aspects of the Holy Prophet's life. To turn over the pages of any of the Books of Tradition is to meet—on every page—with living pen-portraits of different aspects of the Prophet's life.

#### HOW WERE TRADITIONS RELATED AND RECORDED

EACH tradition mentions the last narrator (راوي, i.e., *Ravi*) first, and then step by step it goes back from narrator to narrator until it reaches the Holy Prophet or some

Companion of his. When a tradition goes back to the Holy Prophet it is called *Hadith* (حدث); when only to a Companion it is called *Athar* (أثر). Some authorities confine the term *Hadith* to only religious or exegetical traditions, calling historical traditions by the more general term *Khabar* (خبر). Be that as it may, all kinds of traditions have their varieties. The commonest of them assumes this form: "A related to me that he heard B who heard C say, that the Prophet of God said or did such and such a thing when he and such and such persons were present." This is the form which traditional narratives generally assume. Actually, of course, there are many different and slightly varying forms, and the great traditionists have discussed them all, assigning to each its value. But whatever the difference between form and form, there can be no doubt that the general mode of narration is both natural and safe. Every part of the chain

which runs through it, can be singled out and examined and the whole makes a delightful human appeal, making us feel as though we were part of the company which witnessed the Prophet say or do something.

As I pointed in the beginning, traditions as a repository of history existed even before Islam. The change they underwent with the rise of Islam was in their organization and systematisation, and this turned an inchoate mass of narratives into a Science of Tradition which led to the establishment of many subsidiary sciences. A systematic account of this science is not possible here, but an outline sketch of it may be presented as follows:

**EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL CRITERIA**  
THE fundamental criteria which determine the value of traditions are of two kinds—External (أصول روایت) i.e., *Uṣul Riwayat* and Internal (أصول درایت) i.e., *Uṣul Dirayat*). External criteria relate to the

chain of narration, the medium through which a given tradition reaches us. Internal criteria relate to the inherent plausibility of that tradition, of its subject-matter and of the circumstances in which the subject-matter is presented. The external criteria may be stated broadly as follows :—

- (1) that the narrator should be a well-known person ;
- (2) should be truthful and honest ;
- (3) should possess good understanding and
- (4) a good memory ;
- (5) should not be given to exaggerating, omitting or constructing ;
- (6) should have no personal interest in the tradition ;
- (7) contact between two consecutive narrators should be possible as a matter of history or under the conditions in which they lived ;
- (8) the chain of narration should be

complete, with no breaks anywhere ;

- (9) other things remaining the same, the value of a tradition should depend upon the *character* and *reliability* of the narrators who narrate it ;
- (10) similarly other things remaining the same, the value of a tradition should depend upon the number of reliable narrators who narrate it.

The internal criteria may be set forth as follows :—

- (1) that a tradition should not conflict with any reliable contemporaneous record ; accordingly any tradition which conflicts with the Holy Quran will be rejected ;
- (2) it should not conflict with any accepted or established truth ;
- (3) nor with any other tradition whose validity is stronger ;

- (4) it should not pertain to a matter which could have had a number of narrators but which, nevertheless, has only one narrator;
- (5) it should not be impossible or extremely improbable.<sup>1</sup>

These are the criteria which Muslim traditionists established early in the history of Islam, and in terms of which they judged the traditions which reached them, and which they transmitted to others. No better criteria could have been found. I do not mean to suggest that every one of the Muslim traditionists and historians paid the fullest regard to these criteria, but only, that these criteria were generally adopted as canons of criticism by Muslim traditionists and that they were on the whole observed in their works. It is possible that temperamental peculiarities of

1. For a fuller description of these two kinds of criteria see *Fatḥ al-Mughīth* by Ḥafīẓ Zainuddin 'Abdur Raḥīm b. al-Ḥusain, al-'Irāqī; *Al-Mauḍū'at* by Mulla 'Ali al-Qarī; and *Muqaddama* by Ibn Ṣalāḥ.

individual collectors may have affected their judgment. One collector may have attached more value to one criterion and another to another. It is also possible that some collectors may have been inspired unduly by the ideal of comprehensiveness, and may have included in their collections, traditions possessing only a degree of probability. It is also possible that some collectors may have lacked a proper measure of caution. Nevertheless it remains true that both external and internal criteria were strictly observed by early Muslims, and the more careful among them observed those criteria very strictly indeed. The value which early Muslims attached to external criteria is acknowledged on all hands. But some European writers—and among them is Sir William Muir<sup>1</sup>—deny that Muslims observed the internal criteria of traditions. It is important therefore to present here examples of how internal

1. Sir William Muir, *op. cit.* Introduction pp. 42, 43.

criteria were observed by early Muslim traditionists.

First of all, let it be remembered that the Holy Quran itself inculcates the urgency of both external and internal evidence. Thus it says:—

"If a person, who is a *Fasiq* i.e., an unrighteous person, bring you a report, then look carefully into it."<sup>1</sup>

In this verse, the reference to a *Fasiq* or *unrighteous person* bringing a report points to the urgency of an external examination, and the instruction to *look carefully* points to the equal urgency of an internal examination of the report.

Again it says:—

"Surely they who fabricated the lie (against 'Aisha) are a party from among you . . . . Why did not believing men and women when you heard it, think good of themselves and say, 'This is an obvious lie'? . . . . And why did you not

1. The Holy Quran, 49: 6.

say when you heard it, 'It is not for us to speak of this. Praised be the Lord! This indeed is a mighty calumny'."<sup>2</sup>

The verse clearly points to the importance of internal criticism of reports. The Companions of the Holy Prophet are here rebuked for not discrediting a report which clearly conflicted with 'Aisha's established repute. A report was not to be credited merely because the narrators were apparently decent persons. It was to be judged and examined also in terms of its internal and inherent plausibility.

Following this instruction in the Holy Quran we have a similar instruction in the Hadith. Says the Prophet:—

"It is evidence enough of the untruthfulness of a person that he should relate, without examining, whatever he hears."<sup>3</sup>

This tradition emphasises the need both of an external and internal examination.

1. The Holy Quran, 24: 11-15.

2. *Muslim*, Vol. I, Chapter on "Don'ts about Traditions."

The words *whatever he hears* unequivocally point to the principle that a report does not become credible only because of its channel. It must also be judged in the light of its own internal character. In fact he who does not examine a report before passing it on to others is, according to this tradition, himself a liar.

In short both the Holy Quran and the Hadith require us to pay due regard to the internal as well as the external parts of the evidence. We meet with numerous examples in the Hadith which show that the Companions of the Prophet and those who came after them appealed to internal as well as external evidence. Often they rejected traditions, which were otherwise strongly reported, on the ground that their internal character made them improbable. Thus we read in the Hadith:—

"Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet once said that the use of a thing

cooked on fire, entails on the part of a Muslim the obligation to perform *Wuḍu* (وضوء i.e., ablution), upon which Ibn 'Abbas, interrupting, asked, 'Are we then to perform *Wuḍu*, after we have taken boiled butter or oil, and after we have used warm water?'"<sup>1</sup>

After recording this tradition, Tirmidhi, a well-known collector of Hadith, says that the great majority of Muslim theologians have taught and practised the principle that the use of things cooked on fire does not make *Wuḍu* obligatory. Thus a tradition proceeding from Abu Huraira, to whom we owe more traditions than to any other Companion of the Prophet, is rejected on the ground of its inherent improbability. For, as has been argued, firstly there seems to be no apparent connection between *Wuḍu* and things cooked on fire or touched by it. And secondly when we know that the law of Islam is generally based on the principle that religious duties should not

1. *Tirmidhi, Kitab al-Taharat*, Chapter, 'What is changed by fire.'

be too hard to perform, how could the Holy Prophet have made *Wudu* obligatory merely on the use of a thing cooked on fire? On such grounds most traditionists and legists of Islam—in spite of the authority of Abu Huraira—have disregarded this tradition. It is not suggested here that Ibn 'Abbas or any later traditionists disregarded it, even while they knew that it was a saying of the Prophet. What is suggested here is that according to them Abu Huraira must have misunderstood what the Holy Prophet said, or what the Prophet said must have had only a limited or passing significance. The incident, however, is an example of how a tradition, strongly supported by external testimony, is rejected because of its internal weakness. If traditions reported by a companion of the character of Abu Huraira, who possessed a wonderful memory, are liable to be turned down, because of internal defect, how can Muir or any other

Orientalist say that Muslims paid regard only to the external evidence of traditions, and neglected the urgency of examining their internal character.

In another tradition we learn:—

"Abu Ishaq said that once he and Aswad b. Yazid were sitting together when Sh'abi said that Fa'tima b. Qais had reported that when she was divorced by her husband, the Holy Prophet did not let her have a house or maintenance, upon which Aswad threw a handful of pebbles at Sh'abi and declared, 'Do you tell us this whereas 'Omar hearing the same story said that he could not give up the Quran and the Prophet's own practice, merely on the basis of a woman's statement, about whom we know not whether she understood or remembered exactly what happened.'"<sup>1</sup>

Here we find 'Omar, the Prophet's Second Successor, rejecting the report of a lady because it conflicts with the Quran and the practice of the Prophet, and his explanation is that the lady either did not

1. *Muslim, Kitab al-Talaq*, Chapter, 'The woman who is divorced thrice'.

understand or did not remember what happened. This is a clear example of the best of external testimony being ruled out by 'Omar, on the ground of its inherent lack of plausibility. All later Muslim authorities hold Faṭima to be in the wrong and 'Omar to be in the right.

According to yet another Hadith:—

"Mahmud b. al-Rabi' says that he heard 'Itban b. Malik say that the Holy Prophet once said that whoever truly recited the *Kalima*, i.e., the Muslim formula of faith, would be saved from hell-fire; but that when he (Mahmud) related it to a company including Abu Ayub Anṣari (a Companion of the Prophet), the latter rejected the tradition saying 'By God I cannot think the Holy Prophet could ever say such a thing'."<sup>1</sup>

Here Abu Ayub Anṣari rejects an Hadith which is quite sound as far as external testimony is concerned, on the ground that it does not fit in with his standard of internal probability. It is

1. *Bukhari*, Chapter on 'Non-obligatory prayers'.

possible that Abu Ayub's reasoning was at fault or that he did not understand the significance of the words of the Holy Prophet, but there can be no doubt that this tradition clearly proves that the Companions of the Prophet did not credit traditions merely because *externally* they were correctly reported. They required them besides to stand an *internal* examination.

According to yet another tradition:—

"Ibn 'Abbas says that 'Omar used to say that the Holy Prophet said that crying over the dead brought chastisement to the dead. Ibn 'Abbas further said that after 'Omar died he related this tradition to 'Aisha who said, 'God forgive 'Omar! By God, the Holy Prophet said nothing of the kind. He only said that if the descendants of a *kafir* (i.e. an unbeliever) cried over his dead body, their action tended to augment his punishment,' and by way of argument 'Aisha also said, 'Sufficient for us is the saying of the Quran: Verily no soul can bear the burden of another'."<sup>1</sup>

1. *Bukhari*, *Kitab al-Janaiz*, Chapter, 'Wailing over the dead'.

The importance attached by early Muslims to internal probability is obvious from this Hadith, in which 'Aisha rejects a tradition attributed to 'Omar, the second Khalifa, not by citing just another tradition but by pointing to its own unconvincing character in the light of a verse of the Holy Quran. Whether 'Aisha was right or wrong is quite another matter. My concern here is only to expose the utter futility of the charge that early Muslims did not question traditions so long as they were well reported. For, as would appear from the foregoing examples, they weighed even well-reported traditions in the balance of reason, and on the basis of this internal criterion many great Companions differed among themselves with regard to the value of certain traditions.

**LIMITATIONS OF INTERNAL CRITERIA**  
MUSLIM records furnish other examples besides the four quoted above, but these four should suffice to prove that right

from the days of early Islam traditions were tested in terms both of their internal reasonableness and of their external reliability. There is ample evidence that early Muslim authorities made liberal and honest use of internal criteria. Thus the difficulty which Muir and others have raised has no foundation in fact. If, however, the idea is that internal reasonableness should have a priority over external testimony in all cases, and that a tradition, however well reported, must be rejected only because it does not seem plausible to some, then I must say at once that such a course, however strongly advocated by some European scholars, would be both wrong and dangerous. For, however important the criteria of internal plausibility may be, they involve two serious dangers which must be carefully guarded against. Firstly, the use of such criteria depends on argument and deduction, and these admit of wide differences. Secondly, what is called

plausibility usually takes account only of past experience and information. But experience and information keep growing and new facts are daily added to the old ones. To bind ourselves to past experience is, therefore, to block the way to new knowledge.

The criteria of internal plausibility are thus not an unmixed and unqualified good. One may hastily reject a tradition, because according to him it is in conflict with the Quran; yet it is possible that another may not find it in conflict with any verse of the Quran, and may interpret the Quran and the Hadith in such a way that no conflict is left between the two. Similarly one may reject a tradition because it is against established truth; yet it is possible that according to another the established truth may not be so well established. Still again one may judge a tradition to be against human experience, and yet it is possible that another, whose experience

has been wider or different, may judge it to be quite in harmony with human experience. It follows, therefore, that to stress plausibility always and under all circumstances is not only unreasonable, but calculated to jeopardise the intellectual advance of mankind. The attempt to do so is evidence of a cramped and confined outlook, and if blindly pursued it would only give a setback to human knowledge.

If the early traditionists and historians of Islam had acted upon it to the extent to which Muir and others wish that they might have done, we should have lost a great part of the very important and useful material which we possess to-day on the life of the Holy Prophet. Different writers would have found different traditions repugnant to their own ideas of plausibility and reasonableness and would have each discarded a number of traditions. And yet much of what they would have discarded need not have been unreasonable

at all. Many things which appear to us to be unintelligible at one time turn out to be intelligible at another. The only just course for early Muslim historians, therefore, was to base their works primarily upon reported traditions, but at the same time, to test those traditions in terms of their internal and intrinsic reasonableness. If they had not done so, they would not have left behind those vast treasures of Tradition which we now possess. But for their care in recording properly-reported events and utterances, we would not have had the opportunity to employ to-day their own good principles in order to separate the grain from the chaff of historical material on the subject of early Islamic history.

#### RECORDING OF TRADITIONS

A TRADITION is a tradition whether it is oral or recorded and many traditions of early Islam have come to us by oral

transmission. But, at the same time, some traditions were committed to writing in the very beginning. Some narrators, not trusting their memory, would take down whatever was narrated or reported to them. They would read to others from these written records, and the practice of reading only enhanced the value of their records. With the spread of culture and the wider use of the art of writing, the number of those who wrote down what they heard naturally increased. When the present Books of Tradition began to be collected about the second century of the Hijra, the practice of committing traditions to writing had become well established. Oral transmission had given way to reading traditions from well-kept records. But as in accepted legal practice of all times, the present not excepted, written documents have to be supported by oral evidence. Muslim traditionists, therefore, did not distinguish between oral

and written traditions. There can be no doubt, however, that our present collections of traditions include a fair proportion of traditions which were recorded from the very beginning.

To demonstrate this, it is enough to cite examples of the Holy Prophet's Companions who recorded traditions as soon as they were reported to them. For if we can prove that traditions were recorded even in the days of the Companions when the art of recording was not so widespread, we can very safely assume that this practice must have increased very considerably with the extension of that art in subsequent times. As recording became less and less difficult, it must have been adopted more and more widely as a means of conserving traditions. Apart from the emphasis which the Quran lays on the importance of writing down all contracts, agreements, sales,<sup>1</sup> etc., which must

certainly have impressed the Companions with the importance of writing down every thing of value, the first significant tradition in this connection is the one in which the Holy Prophet is himself reported to have urged the importance of writing on those who could not trust their memory. Thus we read in *Tirmidhi* :—

"Abu Huraira relates of a citizen of Medina who came to the Holy Prophet and said that he heard things from him which he could not remember, upon which the Holy Prophet told him to bring his right hand to his aid, meaning that he should commit the traditions to writing."<sup>1</sup>

It thus appears that at times the Holy Prophet himself urged the importance of writing on those who possessed weak memory. This instruction by the Holy Prophet must have led a number of literate companions to record their traditions. It must at least have led the one, whom the Prophet addressed, to take up that advice.

1. The Quran, 2 : 282.

1. *Tirmidhi*, Chapter on 'Knowledge.'

Thus there is evidence in the Hadith to show that there were Companions who used to write down the traditions. Nay, it is clearly stated that 'Abdullah b. 'Amr b. al-'As used to write down everything that dropped from the lips of the Holy Prophet. Some people dissuaded him from this practice, saying that the Holy Prophet was at times pleased, and at times displeased, and it was not good to put everything into writing. The Holy Prophet hearing that 'Abdullah had been dissuaded, said to him:—

"Do write, for verily whatever comes down from me is of truth."<sup>1</sup>

Upon this 'Abdullah began writing again, a fact which is recorded by Bukhari thus:—

"Abu Huraira is reported to have said, 'Of all the Companions of the Holy Prophet, only 'Abdullah b. 'Amr knows more traditions than I. For 'Abdullah wrote down what he

1. *Abu Da'ud, Kitab al-'Ilm, Chapter on 'Writing down Knowledge.'*

heard, and I did not.'<sup>2</sup>

And again:—

"Says Abu Johaifa, 'I once asked of 'Ali (the fourth Khalifa) if he had anything written down, upon which 'Ali said he had nothing except the Holy Quran. But every Muslim, 'Ali went on, had been endowed with a faculty of reason, by which he could guide himself. 'Ali, however, had one book written in. On my inquiring what it was, he said that it contained traditions about such and such matters."<sup>3</sup>

This shows that even 'Ali took down certain things he heard from the Holy Prophet.

Also:—

"Abu Huraira relates that at the time of the conquest of Mecca, the Holy Prophet delivered a sermon in which he said such and such a thing upon which a man from Yemen came forward and requested the Prophet for a written copy of the sermon. The Holy Prophet thereupon ordered a written copy to be given to the Yemenite."<sup>3</sup>

1. *Bukhari, Chapter on 'Knowledge'.*

2. *Bukhari, ibid.*

3. *Bukhari, ibid.*

It follows from these clear examples that the practice of recording traditions started with the Companions of the Holy Prophet. With the advance of times the practice spread wider and wider. It is not possible nor is it necessary here to cite examples, of the practice of writing down traditions, from later times. But one example may be cited to show how widespread the practice of recording traditions had ultimately become. Yahya b. Mu'in (d. 233 A.H.) a well-known narrator—great traditionists like Bukhari, Muslim, and Abu Daud Sijistani, derive some of their traditions from him—is reported to have had in his possession as many as 600,000 recorded traditions. These he read and reported to others. We read in *Wafayat al-A'yan*—

"Asked how many traditions he had recorded, Yahya b. Mu'in replied that he had, by his own hand, recorded six hundred thousand of them."<sup>1</sup>

1. *Wafayat al-A'yan*, by Ibn Khallikan, Chapter on

It must be remembered that Yahya b. Mu'in was not a collector of traditions, he was only a narrator. We do not owe to him a collection like the one we owe to Bukhari or Muslim. Whatever he recorded, therefore, was recorded by him only as a narrator. The amount of recording which other narrators achieved can be guessed from Yahya's marvellous record.

There can be no doubt, therefore, that the practice of recording, begun by the Companions, extended with years, so that our present collections undoubtedly contain a fairly large proportion of traditions which were reported to their collectors in the written as well as in the oral form. I do not at all mean to suggest that a majority of the Companions used to record traditions, nor even that all the later narrators used to do so. What I suggest is that the practice of recording began in the time of the

Yahya *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib*, gives the number as one million.

Holy Prophet himself and increased with years. A considerable proportion of traditions, however, was still derived from oral transmission. Our present collections, therefore, are made up both of oral and written traditions.

It is as well here to dispose of a saying of the Holy Prophet reported in some books of Hadith,<sup>1</sup> according to which the Holy Prophet forbade the recording of everything except the Holy Quran. It has been argued from this that the Companions did not record any traditions which were therefore all oral. But such a conclusion would be against all facts, and no argument can possibly hold against facts. For, if it is a fact, as we have just proved, that some of the Companions did record traditions, no amount of arguing can possibly alter this fact. Nor need anybody forget the circumstances to which this saying of the

Holy Prophet relates. These circumstances obviously point to the scribes of the Quranic revelation. The Holy Prophet's saying, therefore, was intended only as a warning against mixing up the Quranic revelation with the traditions. The Prophet's instruction that nothing but the Quran was to be recorded had indeed a very important significance but one which was meant only for those who were at the time employed for transcribing the Quranic revelation.

#### HISTORICAL *vs.* OTHER TRADITIONS

IT is time now to point out that notwithstanding the very great care with which Muslim authorities have examined the external and internal evidence for the traditions of early Islam, the standard of criticism which they have applied is not the same for all traditions. It varies with the subject in hand. Accordingly traditions pertaining to matters of

1. For instance see *Muslim*, *Kitab al-Zuhd*.

belief and religious practice are examined more critically, while traditions relating to history and biography are examined somewhat less critically. This is witnessed by a number of authorities. For instance 'Ali b. Burhanuddin al-Halabi says :—

"It is a well-known fact that traditions relating to the biography of the Holy Prophet include not only sound traditions but also those accounted as weak, and those whose chain of narration is defective in one respect or another."<sup>1</sup>

Why this is so, is explained by the same authority in the words of Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal (one of the four Imams of *Fiqh*) and other doctors of *Hadith* :—

"When we record traditions on the subject of lawful and unlawful things, we are strict in our examination but when traditions bear on the Life and similar other matters, we are not so strict."<sup>2</sup>

1. *Sirat al-Halabiyya*, Vol. I, p. 1.

2. *Ibid.*

Further Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal goes on to say :—

"When it is facts of the Life, Wars, etc., and not matters of religious Law, the practice of most authorities is to resort to softer standards ; for, traditions not accepted for purposes of the Law may be accepted for purposes of a life-story, etc."<sup>1</sup>

Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal also gives an interesting example of this :—

"On matters of history and biography we should not hesitate to accept traditions from men like Muhammad b. Israq. But on questions of lawful and unlawful things, we want narrators like this.' Saying this he brought together the four fingers of both hands, and joined them up in a close and firm contact, meaning that such narrators should leave no room for doubt."<sup>2</sup>

Historical and religious traditions, in short, have been approached with different standards of criticism, and this is as it should be. Traditions which were to

1. *Sirat al-Halabiyya*, Vol. I, p. 2.

2. *Fath al-Mughith*, p. 120.

supply the foundations of religious belief and practice required a stricter standard. The importation of weak traditions here would have given rise to many gratuitous conflicts and even errors in beliefs and religious works. But the same standard of criticism was not required for historical traditions, for which comprehensiveness was a greater desideratum than strict and unassailable accuracy. For, with all the sources assembled the less reliable traditions can at any time be eliminated by systematic criticism.

In any case the religious traditions possess a stricter standard of reliability, and there is nothing to lament over this. The stricter standard of theological traditions is meant to protect the theology of Islam from unwarranted interpretations and grave disagreements, and the softer standard of historical traditions is meant to make the historical records as comprehensive as possible. For history the more urgent need is to conserve all available

material for subsequent criticism and construction. For theology the all important requirement is precision and accuracy, it being better and safer here to drop an accurate report than to include an inaccurate one. This does not mean that *all* theological traditions are unquestionable, nor that *all* historical traditions are questionable. It only means that the theological traditions belong to a superior standard of accuracy. That is why, for later historical construction, the more careful Muslim historians have placed greater reliance on those historical traditions which appear as incidental material in the course of theological traditions than on ordinary historical traditions appearing in books of historical traditions. For instance if the battle of Badr (the first battle fought by the Holy Prophet) finds incidental description in *Sahih al-Bukhari* which is a book of Hadith, i.e., theological traditions, the narrative would undoubtedly

carry far more weight than a narrative of the same battle occurring, say, in the *Sirat* of Ibn Ishaq which is merely a book of historical traditions. This point is of very great importance and must not be lost sight of by any impartial biographer or historian. Needless to say I have kept it in view throughout my biography of the Holy Prophet.

#### THE SCIENCE OF HADITH

THE science of Hadith founded by Muslims aims at an elucidation of the canons of external and internal scrutiny of reports about what the Holy Prophet said or did. A large number of works is devoted to it, and these include works by earlier as well as by later writers. The following works by later writers are the best known and the most widely used. They also contain synopses of most of the earlier works:—

1. *'Ulum al-Hadith* (علوم الحديث المعروفة) (بمقدمة ابن صلاح) popularly known as *Muqaddama Ibn Salah*, by Hafiz Abu 'Amr 'Uthman b. 'Abdur Rahman known as Ibn Salah (d. 643 A.H.).
2. *Fath al-Mughith fi Uṣūl al-Hadith* (فتح المغثث في اصول الحديث) by Hafiz Zainuddin 'Abdur Rahim b. al-Husain al-'Iraqi (d. 805 A.H.).
3. *Sharḥ Alfāt al-'Iraqi fi Uṣūl al-Hadith* (شرح الفيضة العراق في اصول الحديث) by Muḥammad b. 'Abdur Rahman al-Sakhawi (d. 902 A.H.).
4. *Al-Mauḍu'at* (الموضوعات) by Nurud-din Mulla 'Ali b. Muḥammad Sultan al-Qari (d. 1016 A.H.).

In these standard works the canons of external and internal scrutiny have been discussed at great length, and have been illustrated by a wealth of material. The last of these is primarily meant for a

discussion of fabricated traditions, but there is much incidental discussion of the general principles of Hadith.

### HADITH TERMINOLOGY

AMONG sciences subsidiary to the Science of Hadith are: (1) the science of terminology *Mustalahat al-Hadith* (مصطلحات الحديث) and (2) the science of biography *Asma al-Rijal* (أسماء الرجال). The former seeks to classify different kinds of Hadith, to provide names for the different kinds, and to assign to them their relative value. Those more easily distinguished are the following:—

- (1) *Mutawatir* (متواتر), i.e. reported by so many reporters that it is impossible for such a large number of reporters to agree on a falsehood.
- (2) *Ahad* (احاد), i.e. reported by a limited number of reporters and comprising the three following

classes of traditions, viz., *Mash-hur*, *Aziz* and *Gharib*.

- (3) *Mash-hur* (مشهور), i.e. reported always by three or more than three reporters but not by such a number as may bring the tradition within the definition of *Mutawatir*.
- (4) *Aziz* (عزيز), i.e. reported always by two reporters.
- (5) *Gharib* (غريب) or *Fard* (فرد), i.e. reported at any stage by one single person.
- (6) *Shadh* (شاذ), i.e. reported by a single reliable reporter against other reporters.
- (7) *Munkar* (منكر), i.e. derived from a weak source, and opposed to another more reliable report.
- (8) *Sahih* (صحيح), i.e. intrinsically sound, all narrators of which are truthful.
- (9) *Hasan* (حسن), i.e. fair, one lying

between sound and weak.

- (10) *Daeef* (ضعیف), i.e. weak, one of the narrators of which is accused of telling lies or accused of other weakness.
- (11) *Matrook* (متروک), i.e. the narrator of which has been discarded by authorities.
- (12) *Maudoo'* (موضوع), i.e. fabricated.
- (13) *Marfoo'* (مروفوع), i.e. going back right up to the Prophet himself.
- (14) *Mauqoof* (موقوف), i.e. going back to a Companion.
- (15) *Maqtoo'* (مقطوع), i.e. going back only to a Successor.
- (16) *Muttasil* (متصل), i.e. having an unbroken chain of narrators.
- (17) *Munqati'* (منقطع), i.e. any of the narrators of which is missing.
- (18) *Mu'allaq* (معلق), i.e. one or more of the narrators of which are missing in the beginning.
- (19) *Mursal* (مرسل), i.e. related by a

Successor without naming any Companion.

- (20) *Mu'dal* (محض), i.e. with two consecutive reporters missing.
- (21) *Mu'allal* (معلل), i.e. apparently reliable but really not so.
- (22) *Mudallas* (محلل), i.e. when a person who relates it does so on the authority of a contemporary whom he may have met, but from whom he has not actually heard, so as to show that he heard it from him.
- (23) *Mubham* (مبهوم), i.e. in which the narrator says he has received the report from somebody but does not name the reporter.
- (24) *Mu'an'an* (معان)، i.e. reported not in the words "I heard it from" or "he related it to me," etc., but simply with the word "from."
- (25) *Mudtarib* (مضطرب), i.e. in which

the narrations differ or there is some confusion in the chain of narrators.

- (26) *Mudraj* (مدرج), i.e. interpolated and added to.
- (27) *Qauli* (قولى), i.e. narrating the words of the Prophet.
- (28) *F'ili* (فعلى), i.e. narrating the deeds of the Prophet.
- (29) *Taqriri* (تقريري), i.e. where the Prophet has said nothing but upheld a deed done by another before his eyes.
- (30) *Qudsi* (قدسى), i.e. where the Prophet says that God has told him so and so, etc., etc.

Several books have been devoted to this science of terminology, the best known of which are the following :—

1. *Nuzhat al-Nazar fi Taudih Nukhbat al-Fikar* (نرھۃ النظر فی توضیح نخبۃ الفکر), by Abul Faḍl Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalani (d. 852, A.H.).

2. *Al-Yawaqit wal Durar* (الیوقیت والدرر), by Shaikh Muḥammad 'Abdur Rauf al-Munawi (d. 1031, A.H.).<sup>1</sup>

#### BIOGRAPHIES OF NARRATORS

THE critical study of the biographies of narrators is known as the science of *Asma al-Rijal* (اسماء الرجال). It aims at a criticism of the lives and characters of narrators who figure in historical and theological traditions. Reference to it becomes necessary when the chain of narrators is under examination. Studies devoted to it are indeed very extensive. According to Sir William Muir early Muslim Biographics, as the science of *Asma al-Rijal* may be called, has made it possible to preserve the life-histories of about 40,000 narrators,<sup>2</sup> a record unrivalled in the history of the world. These 40,000 biographies are not superficial accounts but critical compilations, in

1. The same author has written a commentary on *Shamail Tirmidhi*, which is a useful addition to the literature on *Sirat*.  
2. Sir William Muir, *op cit*, Introduction p. 42.

which every narrator has all his relevant particulars set forth: name, *kunya*, genealogy, date of birth, date of death, place of residence, life-history, habits and character, intellectual attainments, intelligence, judgment and memory, honesty and integrity, the narrator's method of narration and its peculiarities, his teachers, his pupils, his contemporaries, etc., are all set forth, and set forth in a clear, definite and determinate manner.

The first man to turn to this line of systematic study was Shu'ba b. al-Hajjaj (d. 160 A.H.). He was followed by Imam Yaḥya b. Sa'eed al-Qattan (d. 198 A.H.), who prepared the first biographical collection. Later 'Allama Aḥmad b. 'Abdullah al-Ijli (d. 261 A.H.) and Imam 'Abdur Rahman b. Abi Ḥatim al-Razi (d. 327 A.H.) wrote useful books on the subject. Both the two last mentioned authorities called their respective works, *al-Jarh wal-Ta'dil* (الجرح والتعديل). But of the earlier works,

the most comprehensive and reliable is *al-Kamil fi Ma'rifat al-Du'afa wal-Matrukin* (الكامل في معرفة الضعفاء والمتروكين), by Abu Aḥmad 'Abdullah b. Muḥammad b. 'Adi (d. 365 A.H.).<sup>1</sup> Besides them, Ḥafiz Muḥammad b. 'Amr al-'Oqaili (d. 322 A.H.) and Imam Darquṭni (d. 385 A.H.) also wrote on the subject. Unfortunately, however, most of these books have perished and our knowledge of them is derived only from references to them in later works.

Of the later works, based on the earlier ones, the following are the best known:—

- (1) *Al-Kamil fi M'arifat al-Rijal* (الكامل في معرفة الرجال), by Ḥafiz 'Abdul Ghani b. 'Abdul Wahid al-Maqdasi (d. 600 A.H.).
- (2) *Tahdhib al-Kamal fi M'arifat al-Rijal* (تحذيب الكمال في معرفة الرجال), by Ḥafiz Jamaluddin Yusuf b. Zaki al-Mizzi (d. 742 A.H.).

1. *Kashf al-Zunoon*, Vol. I, p. 391.

- (3) *Mizan al-Itidal fi Naqd al-Rijal* (میزان الامتنال فی تقدیم الرجال) in 3 volumes, by Ḥafiz Shamsuddin Abu 'Abdullah Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabi (d. 748 A.H.).
- (4) *Taḥdīb al-Taḥdīb* (تذهیب التهذیب) in 12 volumes, by Ḥafiz Abul Faḍl Aḥmad b. 'Ali b. Muḥammad b. Ḥajar al-'Asqalani (d. 852 A.H.).
- (5) *Al-Isti'ab fi M'arifat al-Āshab* (الاستیعاب فی معرفة الاصحاب) in 2 volumes, by Abu 'Amr Yusuf b. 'Abdullah b. 'Abd al-Bar al-Qurtubi (d. 463 A.H.).
- (6) *Usd al-Ghaba fi M'arifat al-Āshaba* (اسد الغابه فی معرفة الصحاب) in 5 volumes, by Ḥafiz 'Izziddin Abul Hasan 'Ali b. Muḥammad b. 'Abdul Karim known as Ibn al-Āthir al-Jazari (d. 630 A.H.).
- (7) *Isaba fi Tamyaż al-Āshaba* (اصابه فی تمییز الصحاب) in 10 vols.,

by Ḥafiz Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalani (d. 852 A.H.).

The last three of these do not belong to the general science of Biographics but contain only accounts of the Companions of the Prophet. It is obvious, however, that their subject-matter is very closely connected with that of the others.

#### BOOKS ON HADITH

THE literature on traditions is divisible into three great classes:—

- (1) *Al-Hadith* (الحدیث) or what may be termed as Theological traditions.
- (2) *Al-Tafsir* (التفسیر) or Exegesis.
- (3) *Al-Sirat* and *al-Tarikh* (السیرة) (التاریخ) or Biography and History.

*Hadith* is a general name for those collections of traditions, the main significance of which is theological, but which may also contain some historical and exegetic traditions. On the whole, such traditions reach back to the Holy Prophet.

The last narrator attributes a word or deed to the Prophet himself, or the Prophet acquiesces in somebody else's word or deed, which word or deed the Prophet heard or saw. But sometimes the traditions stop with the Companions of the Prophet. They are then called *Athar* (أثر). Works of Ḥadīth were mainly composed in the second, third or fourth century of the Hijra. They do not, however, all have the same status or authority; for, not all traditionists have observed the same rigorous standards of criticism and caution. The following are the better known works on Ḥadīth with brief comments on their relative value<sup>1</sup> :—

1. *Ṣahīh al-Bukhārī* ( صحيح البخاري ) by Imam Muḥammad b. Isma'il al-Bukhārī (b. 194. d. 256 A.H.).

Commonly regarded as the most reliable

1. I have here confined myself only to the standard works of Ḥadīth accepted by the main body of the Muslims, i.e. the Ahl Sunna. The Shias have their own books of Ḥadīth, the best known of which is *al-Kāfi* by Muḥammad b. Yaqub al-Kulīnī (d. 328 A.H.). But these have little historical value

of all works on Ḥadīth. Bukhārī examined altogether 600,000 traditions, and out of these he selected only 4,000 for his collection. He was a very pious and righteous person and observed the utmost caution and care in his work. His standard of criticism is undoubtedly the highest and the book is rightly known as occupying a position second only to the Quran. Imam Bukhārī was born at Bukhāra in Central Asia and travelled far and wide before he returned to his native town for compiling his great collection of Ḥadīth.<sup>1</sup>

2. *Ṣahīh Muslim* ( صحيح مسلم ), by Imam Muslim b. al-Hajjāj (b. 204. d. 261 A.H.), comes next to Bukhārī but is considered superior to all the other works on Ḥadīth. A tradition agreed to by Muslim and Bukhārī is regarded as the most reliable,

1. Bukhārī is the author of other works also, of which the better known are *Al-Adab al-Mufrad* (الآداب المفرد), a short collection of miscellaneous traditions; and *Al-Tarikh al-Saghīr* (التأريخ الصغیر) a summary of biographical notes on the Holy Prophet and his Companions.

being technically known as *Muttafaq 'Alaih* (متفق عليه), i.e., the one agreed upon). Muslim was born at Nishapur in Khurasan, a province in North East Persia.

3. *Jami' al-Tirmidhi* (جامع الترمذى), by Abu 'Isa Muhammad b. 'Isa, al-Tirmidhi (b. 209, d. 279 A.H.). Abu 'Isa who was a pupil of Bukhari, was born at Tirmidh, a town on the eastern bank of the Oxus in Central Asia.

4. *Sunan Abu Daud* (سنن أبو داود), by Abu Daud Sulaiman b. al-Asha'th (b. 202, d. 275 A.H.). Abu Daud belonged to the Province of Sijistan in Central Asia, but his place of birth is not quite known. Some authorities assert that he was born near Basra in a small village called Sijistan, but the people of Basra deny the existence of such a village. He died at Basra.

5. *Sunan al-Nasai* (سنن النسائي), by Ahmad b. Shu'aib al-Nasai (b. 215, d. 306 A.H.). The author was born at Nasa in Khurasan and died at Mecca.

6. *Sunan Ibn Majah* (سنن ابن ماجه), by Muhammad b. Yazid Ibn Majah (b. 209, d. 273 A.H.). Ibn Majah was born at Qazwin in Persia and like his contemporaries travelled far and wide in search of traditions.

The last four books, along with the first two, constitute the *Šiħah Sitta* (صحاح ستة), i.e., the Six Sound Ones. All of them are regarded as reliable, their order of reliability being indicated by their order in the above list.

7. *Muwatṭa Imam Malik* (موطأ امام مالك), by Imam Malik b. Anas (b. 95, d. 179 A.H.).

This work is of a high order, some regarding it even as reliable as Bukhari. But the style of the greater part of this work has turned it into more of a book on *Fiqh* (فقہ or Muslim Jurisprudence) than on *Hadith*. It has not, therefore, been classed with the other *Šiħah*, although, in respect of its intrinsic merit, it is second

to none among the various Hadith collections. Imam Malik is one of the four *Imams*, i.e. pillars or leaders of the Science of Fiqh. He was born in Medina, the city of the Prophet, and came in closest touch with the early leaders of Muslim thought.

8. *Musnad Imam Abu Hanifa* (مسند امام ابو حنیفہ), by Imam N'uman b. Thabit Abu Hanifa (b. 80, d. 150 A.H.). Abu Hanifa was born at Kufa in Iraq and died imprisoned at Baghdad, where he had been confined by the orders of the Khalifa al-Manṣur for refusing to become a *Qadi*. Abu Hanifa occupies the highest position and has the largest number of followers among the four Imams of Fiqh, being generally known as امام اعظم, i.e. the Great Imam. He is not known as a collector of traditions, nor did he turn to this line of study, except as a preparation for his main work on Jurisprudence. His two pupils, Imam Abu Yusuf and Imam Muḥammad, also occupy a very high position.

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9. *Musnad Imam al-Shafi'i* (مسند امام شافعی), by Imam Muḥammad b. Idris al-Shafi'i (b. 105, d. 204 A.H.).

The author, who was born at Ghazza in Syria and was taken to Mecca as an infant, is yet another of the four Imams of Fiqh and his work on Hadith is a prolegomena to his work on Fiqh.

10. *Musnad Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal* (مسند امام احمد ابن حنبل), by Imam Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. Hanbal (b. 164, d. 242 A.H.).

The author, the latest of the four Imams of Fiqh, is also distinguished for his remarkable collection of Hadith, the largest perhaps of all collections, the general standard of which, however, is not as high as that of the *Sīhah*. He was born at Baghdad, the centre of Muslim culture in those days.

11. *Sunan al-Darimi* (سنن الدارمي), by 'Abdullah b. 'Abdur Rahman al-Darimi (b. 181, d. 255 A.H.).

He belonged to Samarcand and has a

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fairly high position, but only after the *Siḥah*.

12. *Mu'jam al-Kabir wal-Ausat wal-Ṣaghir* (معجم الكبير والوسط والصغرى), by Sulaiman b. Ahmad al-Tabarani (b. 260, d. 360 A.H.). He was born at Ṭabariya in Syria, but later settled in Isfahan, where he died at the good old age of one hundred years. He is a well-known traditionist.

13. *Sunan al-Darquṭni* (سنن الدارقطنی), by 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Darquṭni (b. 306, d. 385 A.H.).

The author was born in a quarter of Baghdad known as Dar al-Quṭn, i.e., the house of cotton. He is a traditionist of good repute who has also a book on *Asma al-Rijal* to his credit.

14. *Mustadrak al-Ḥakim* (مستدرك الحاکم), by Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad b. 'Abdullah al-Ḥakim (b. 321, d. 405 A.H.).

The author, who belonged to Nishapur, was a very learned man, who observed a

fairly high standard of criticism in his compilation.

15. *Shu'ab al-Iman* and *Dalail al-Nubawwa*, etc. (شعب الایمان ودلائل النبوة وغير ذلك) comprising miscellaneous works on Tradition, theological as well as historical, by Ahmad b. Ḥusain al-Baihiqi (b. 384, d. 458 A.H.).

This author also is a well-known traditionist, who wielded a versatile pen. He was a pupil of al-Ḥakim and was born at Baihiq, a small village near Nishapur.

Besides the above there have been other collectors of traditions,<sup>1</sup> who, notwithstanding the distance which separates some of

1. Among them are:—(a) Tayalisi (204 A.H.); (b) Abdur Razzaq (211 A.H.); (c) Sa'id b. Mansoor (229 A.H.); (d) Ibn Abi Shaiba (235 A.H.); (e) Ibn Rahwaih (238 A.H.); (f) 'Abd b. Ḥumaid (249 A.H.); (g) Bazzar (292 A.H.); (h) Abu Y'ala (307 A.H.); (i) Ibn al-Mundhir (309 A.H.); (j) Ibn Khuzaima (311 A.H.); (k) Tahawi (321 A.H.); (l) 'Oqaili (322 A.H.); (m) Ibn Abi Ḥatim (327 A.H.); (n) Ibn Ḥibban (354 A.H.); (o) Ibn 'Adi (365 A.H.); (p) Isma'ili (371 A.H.); (q) Ibn Shahin (385 A.H.); (r) Ibn Merdawiah (410 A.H.); (s) Abu Nu'aim (430 A.H.); (t) Khaṭib al-Baghdadi (463 A.H.); (u) Dailami (509 A.H.); (v) Razin b. Muawia (520 A.H.); (w) Ibn 'Asakir (571 A.H.). Some of these are also historians.

them from early Islam, have collected traditions, the chain of which goes back to the Holy Prophet or to his Companions, but I have enumerated above the names of the better known traditionists and their works. Of this list the collections last mentioned include traditions characteristic of the later traditionists—comparatively weak and not as trustworthy as the *Ṣīḥah*, but still containing fairly-spread grains of truth. I have, however, mentioned the more important works on Ḥadīth which an historian can safely use for reconstructing the Life of the Holy Prophet and the early History of Islam. And, as I have said before, the collections of Ḥadīth are far more reliable than those collections of traditions, the primary significance of which is biographical or historical, viz., books on *Sīrat* or biography. Compared with the authentic works on Ḥadīth such as *Bukhārī*, *Muṣlim* and *Muwatta*, the historical works have very little value

indeed, and an impartial historian will not hesitate—unless there are very strong reasons for doing so—to reject all historical traditions that clash with the traditions contained in books like the collections of *Bukhārī*, *Muṣlim*, *Muwatta*, *Tirmidhi* and *Abu Daud* and he will also generally prefer other traditions of Ḥadīth to historical traditions. This very important point has unfortunately been lost sight of by most European biographers—they have based their works mainly on the works of *Sīrat*, ignoring almost all relevant matter occurring incidentally in the books of Ḥadīth, or for that matter in the Holy Quran itself. The mistake was perhaps unavoidable; for, whereas the books on *Sīrat* and biography contain well-arranged narratives composed and systematised in the form of history, one has to search for the scattered grains of history in the Holy Quran and the Ḥadīth, in which historical facts have been mentioned not as part of

biography or history but as material bearing on morals, theology and jurisprudence. This deplorable oversight is responsible for many errors in the works of European writers.

#### SUNNA AND HADITH

SOMETHING about *Sunna* (سنة) would be in place here. The common tendency to regard *Sunna* and *Hadith* as synonymous terms is quite mistaken. For, the two are quite different. *Hadith* is the name given to those verbal (oral or written) reports of the sayings and doings of the Holy Prophet, which the Companions (صحابي) transmitted through their Successors (تابعون) and Successors' successors (تابع تابع) to later times, and which doctors of *Hadith*, after due criticism, reduced to a systematic form. *Sunna*, on the other hand, is the name given to the Prophet's practice, which has been transmitted from generation to generation, not through any verbal reports, but through the collective and continuous practice of

the believers. For instance, the Holy Quran teaches about *Namaz*, the institution of Muslim worship. Now whether or not the Holy Prophet gave any determinate instructions to the companions on this subject, there can be no doubt that the details of *Namaz* were imparted to them effectively by the Prophet's own living example. This example was spread over the lifetime of the Prophet. And this the Companions constantly observed. Its value was enhanced by the Prophet's own vigilance. So the Companions learnt the details of *Namaz* from the Prophet's own daily example. The Companions imparted it to the Successors, the Successors to their successors and so on.

Throughout this process, practice was transmitted as practice and, for all we know, was transmitted without much or any verbal instruction. Other institutional practices of Islam have been transmitted to subsequent generations in the same way.

The primary sources of Islam, therefore, turn out to be the Holy Quran and the *Sunna*; and these have been closely co-ordinated from the very beginning. Hadith, as distinct from *Sunna*, turns out to be only a secondary source of Islam, the main function of it being to provide philosophical explanation or incidental evidence for the *Sunna*; it is not a primary source. It is a mistake, therefore, to regard Hadith and *Sunna* as the same thing. I should not have pointed this out but for a tendency to ignore the genesis and the distinctive importance of the *Sunna* and to think, in consequence, that the institutions of Islam are founded on sources that came into existence about 200 years after its rise.

#### BOOKS ON TAFSIR

THE second division of works on tradition is devoted to *Tafsir* or Exegesis of the Holy Quran. As this division is concerned with the interpretation of the Holy Quran,

it often tends to be philosophical and speculative. The standard of criticism which it observes is, like that of historical traditions, somewhat lower than that of theological traditions. But it is, nevertheless, a useful collection which can be turned to good account by writers on biography and history. The more important works on the exegesis of the Holy Quran containing the sayings of the Prophet and the Companions are the following :

1. *Tafsir Ibn Jarir* (تفسير ابن جرير) in 30 vols., by Imam Abu Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (b. 224, d. 310 A.H.).

Of all the exegetical works on tradition this is the earliest and the most comprehensive. But a number of weak traditions have found their way into it.

2. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (تفسير ابن كثير) in 4 vols., by Ḥafiz 'Imaduddin Isma'il b. 'Omar Ibn Kathir (b. 700, d. 774 A.H.).

This work is commonly regarded as very reliable and authentic. According to

Zurqani, himself a critic of no mean repute, there is not another work like it.

3. *Al-Durr al-Manthur fil Tafsir bil Mathur* (الدر المنشور في التفسير بالمانثور) in 6 vols., by Shaikh Jalaluddin 'Abdur Rahman b. Abi Bakr al-Suyuti (b. 849, d. 911 A.H.).

This is a later work which, though comprehensive, contains material of very unequal value.

#### EARLIER WORKS ON BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

THE third division of works on tradition is devoted to biography, history and the early wars of Islam. The aim of these works is to bring together traditions about the Life of the Holy Prophet, the wars and the earlier History of Islam. But, as I have pointed out already, the standard of these works is inferior to that of works on theology. The purpose which inspired their original collection was to make historical material safe and secure before it

was destroyed by the ravages of time. Their standard of criticism was not so strict, because their authors assumed that with material made safe and secure, its criticism could be left to later generations. Indeed with the Holy Quran and the Hadith in our possession, such a task is not difficult. The earlier works of this division, which also includes works on the Geography and History of Arabia, are the following:—

1. *Kitab al-Maghazi* (كتاب المغازي), by Muhammed b. Muslim b. Shihab al-Zuhri (b. 51, d. 124 A.H.). This is probably the earliest work on the Life of the Holy Prophet and the earlier wars. Imam Zuhri, himself a *Tabi'i* (تابع), i.e. a Successor), had met many Companions, and had heard from their lips, accounts of the earlier History of Islam. He had a most balanced mind, and was very learned and well-informed. Unfortunately his work has perished. References to it, however, are to be found

in many other works. Traditions reported orally by him are also recorded in many works and are usually regarded as very reliable. Zuhri was a native of Medina.

2. *Al-Maghazi* (المغازي), by Musa b. 'Uqba (d. 141 A.H.), one of the most distinguished of Imam Zuhri's pupils. He had met some Companions, was a most careful writer and never accepted anything until he had fully weighed and considered it. Imam Malik took lessons in Hadith from him. Musa was a freed slave and lived at Medina.

3. *Sirat Ibn Ishaq* (سیرۃ ابن اسحاق), by Muhammad b. Ishaq (d. 151 A.H.). Another pupil of Imam Zuhri and a recognised authority on Biography. Ibn Ishaq was a native of Medina. His work has been commonly regarded as the source-book on the Life of the Prophet and on the early Muslim Wars. Later historians mostly draw on this work. Some people have doubts about his reliability, but these

do not seem justified. Only, he is an historian by temperament. His standard of criticism is not as high as that of Hadith. That is why Imam Bukhari has not drawn on his Hadith at all, but has drawn freely on his History. His work is not available. But Ibn Hisham has reproduced most of it in his own work.

4. *Sirat Ibn Hisham* (سیرۃ ابن هشام), by Abu Muhammad 'Abdul Malik b. Hisham (d. 213 A.H.). Ibn Hisham originally belonged to Basra but migrated later to Egypt, where he died in the year 213 or 218 A.H. He was a great historian whose reliability is commonly acknowledged. His work, based mostly on Ibn Ishaq's, is both comprehensive and complete. Of all the works on the Life of the Prophet, his is the best known and the most popular.

5. *Kitab al-Maghazi* (كتاب المغازي), by Muhammad b. 'Omar al-Waqidi (b. 130, d. 207 A.H.)

Waqidi was a resident of Medina but later settled down in Baghdad, where he served as Qadi for a number of years. A very widely informed historian, but being indifferent to truth and falsehood, he is condemned by all authorities as quite unreliable and unauthentic. I am appending a separate note about him.

6. *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* (كتاب الطبقات الكبير), by Muḥammad Ibn S'ad (b. 168, d. 230 A.H.). A distinguished pupil and secretary of Waqidi; but, in spite of this, he is himself reliable and authentic. His work, in twelve volumes, contains a mass of detailed information. The first two and a half volumes are devoted to the Holy Prophet, the rest to the Companions. Stripped of Waqidi's influence which, unfortunately, is not small, this work should possess great value and validity. Ibn S'ad also was a Medinite.

7. *Tarikh al-Umam wal-Muluk* (تاريخ الامم والملوک), by Abu Ja'far Ibn Jarir

al-Ṭabari (b. 224, d. 310 A.H.).

This is a work not on biography but on history, but it includes a detailed account of the Prophet's Life. Ṭabari was born at a place called Amul in Ṭabaristan and died in Baghdad. He is one of the best known and perhaps the most reliable of Muslim historians. His work, in twelve volumes, is a most comprehensive work on History. Besides collecting traditions from Ibn Ishāq, Waqidi, and Ibn S'ad, he has added many traditions of his own. He has left on the whole a very worthy collection of material on history and biography.

8. *Shamail al-Tirmidhi* (شمائل الترمذى), by Abu 'Isa Muḥammad bin 'Isa al-Tirmidhi (b. 209, d. 279 A.H.).

His work on Hadith has already been mentioned. This work contains personal details about the Prophet, and describes in a brief but beautiful manner his personal appearance, habits, and character. Tirmidhi, who was a pupil of Bukhari, is one of the

great collectors of Hadith.

9. *Kitab al-Ma'arif* (كتاب المعرف), by 'Abdullah b. Muslim b. Qutaiba (b. 213, d. 276 A.H.).

This is a general work on history; accounts of the Holy Prophet and of the more distinguished Companions are included.<sup>1</sup>

10. *Futuh al-Buldan*, (فتح البلدان) by Abu J'afar Ahmad b. Yahya b. Jabir al-Baladhuri (d. 279 A.H.).

This popular work contains an account of the victories of the Holy Prophet and his Successors. Baladhuri is a well-known historian.

11. *Kitab al-Kharaj* (كتاب الخراج), by Qadi Abu Yusuf Ya'qub b. Ibrahim (d. 182 A.H.).

Abu Yusuf was a well-known legist, and

1. Ibn Qutaiba is a well-known writer. His book, *Poetry and the Poets* (الشعر والشعراء), is a popular and authoritative account of the pre-Islamic and early Muslim poets and their poetry.

one of the most distinguished pupils of Imam Abu Hanifa, founder of the Hanafi School of Muslim jurisprudence. His work gives an authoritative account of the various taxes which the Holy Prophet and his Khalifas levied upon populations under their rule.

12. *Muruj al-Dhahab* (مروج الذهب), by Abul Hasan 'Ali b. Husain al-Mas'udi (d. 346 A.H.).

This book begins with a history of the peoples of the world and passes on to a history of Arabia right up to the Abbaside period. Mas'udi is a writer of great repute.

13. *Tajarib al-Umam* (تجارب الأمم), by Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Miskawaih (d. 421 A.H.).

This is a book on general history beginning with the period just following the time of the great deluge of Noah and containing a brief sketch of the Holy Prophet's Life, finally ending with the Abbaside period. Ibn Miskawaih was an intelligent writer

and, although his work is mainly based on the collections of earlier historians, he has been able to bring to light some new phases of Muslim History.

14. *Tarikh Makka* (تاريخ مكة), by Abul Walid Muḥammad b. Abdul Karim al-Azraqi (d. 223 A.H.).

Contains an historical account of Mecca, the Ka'ba and the Quraish.

15. *Ṣifatu Jazirat al-Arab* (صفة جزيرة العرب), by Abu Muḥammad Ḥasan b. Aḥmad b. Ya'qub al-Hamdani, popularly known as Ibn al-Ḥaik (d. 334 A.H.).<sup>1</sup>

One of the earliest and most reliable Geographies of Arabia.

These works constitute the historical sources of the Life of the Holy Prophet and of the earlier History of Islam. All later works derive their material from them. Not all of them, however, are

1. One of his works *Iklil*, in ten parts, contains an account of the tribe Ḥimyar, and of the History of Yemen besides much general information (*vide Kashf al-Ẓunān*, Art. on *Iklil*).

works on biography and history. But their subject-matter is closely connected with the Life of the Prophet and the early History of Islam. Of proper works on biography that still exist, there are only four, viz., *Sirat Ibn Hisham*; *Kitab al-Maghazi* by Waqidi; *Tabaqat Ibn S'ad*; and *Tarikh al-Tabari*. Of these four Waqidi is universally condemned. We are, therefore, left with only three, viz., Ibn Hisham, Ibn S'ad and Tabari. There is no doubt that next to the Holy Quran and the Books of Hadith, biographical material is to be derived mainly from these three sources.

#### WAQIDI

I might have spared this separate note on Waqidi, but for the amazing importance which some European biographers of the Prophet have attached to this historian. Waqidi lived from 130 to 207 A.H. and there is no doubt, that judging from the times during which he lived, his

position is no less fortunate than that of any other biographer of the Prophet. But this fact cannot alter his personal qualities and character, and it is but a sad truth that, in spite of his learning, Waqidi is an utterly untrustworthy writer, all authorities unanimously declaring him to be a liar and a fabricator. This is not to say that all his traditions are fabrications. The most hardened liar does not always lie, and many things he might say, would yet be true. But as Waqidi was given to lying, he cannot command our confidence. He was no doubt very learned. Few historians have been as well-informed as he. But it seems as though learning itself had corrupted him, so that instead of confessing ignorance about matters of which he knew nothing, he would proceed to construct them out of his own imagination. Truly has one authority said of him :—

“Waqidi is always remarkable, whether he tells a truth or a lie.”<sup>1</sup>

1. *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib*, under ‘Waqidi’.

Unfortunately, the powers of elaboration and graphic description which should condemn him as a scientific biographer, seem to have endeared him to some European writers. It does not seem to concern them whether Waqidi has regard for truth or not, whether he is at all as careful and cautious as a true historian should be, or whether he is not a clever and voluble writer who constructs much and reports little. They are infatuated by his concreteness and realism, and remain unimpressed by the strongest testimony against him. All traditions according to them have equal claims and they are their best judges. The portentous care and industry with which Muslim savants have collected the life-histories of narrators, and provided the world with an almost unerring instrument of criticism, does not seem to impress them at all. Nobody of course can stop them from pleasing themselves as they like, but to

give the reader some idea of the kind of authority Waqidi is, I append here the opinions which well-known authorities of acknowledged integrity and judgment have expressed about Waqidi:—

(a) Imam Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (b. 161, d. 241 A.H.), says:—

“Waqidi is a great liar who used to distort traditions.”

(b) Abu Aḥmad 'Abdullah b. Muḥammad known as Ibn 'Adi (b. 277, d. 365 A.H.), says:—

“Waqidi's traditions are not reliable and the fault springs from his own character.”

(c) Abu Ḥatim Muḥammad b. Idris (b. 195, d. 277 A.H.) says:—

“Waqidi fabricates traditions himself.”

(d) 'Ali b. 'Abdullah b. Ja'far, known as Ibn al-Madini (b. 161, d. 234 A.H.), says:—

“Waqidi used to cook false traditions. I do not consider him reliable from any point of view.”

(e) Imam 'Ali b. Muḥammad al-Darquṭni (b. 306, d. 385 A.H.), says:—

“Waqidi's traditions are weak.”

(f) Ishaq b. Ibrahim known as Ibn Rahwaih (b. 161, d. 238 A.H.), says:—

“Waqidi is one of the fabricators of Hadith.”

(g) Imam Bukhari (b. 194, d. 256 A.H.), says:—

“Waqidi is not one of whom we may accept any traditions.”

(h) Imam Yaḥya b. Mu'in (b. 185, d. 233 A.H.), says:—

“Waqidi deserves no respect. He used to mutilate and distort traditions.”

(i) Imam Shafi'i (b. 150, d. 204 A.H.), says:—

“Waqidi's books are without exception a mass of falsehood. He used to forge authorities for his traditions.”

(j) Imam Abu Daud Sijistani (b. 202, d. 275 A.H.), says:—

“I should not accept Waqidi's traditions at all; he used to fabricate.”

(k) Imam Nasai (b. 215, d. 303 A.H.), says:—

“Waqidi was one of those liars whose lies are patent and known to everybody.”

(l) Muḥammad b. Bashshar Bundar (b. 167, d. 252 A.H.), says:—

"I have not known a bigger liar than Waqidi."

(m) Imam Nawawi (d. 674 A.H.) says:—

"All authorities are agreed that Waqidi is a reporter of weak traditions."

(n) 'Allama Dhahabi (d. 748 A.H.) says:—

"All authorities are agreed in regarding Waqidi as feeble."

(o) Qadi Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrahim known as Ibn Khallikan (d. 681 A.H.), says:—

"Waqidi has been judged feeble and has been much criticised."

(p) 'Allama Zurqani (d. 1122 A.H.) says:—

"When Waqidi is alone in reporting a tradition, he is not believed; what would you then think of a tradition which he reports in contradiction to others?"<sup>1</sup>

1. For these opinions see *Mizan al-I'tidal* for (a) to (f); *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib* for (g) to (n); *Wafayat al-A'yan* for (o); and *Sharḥ Mawahib al-Ludunniya* for (p).

This is the considered opinion which Muslim savants of acknowledged repute and unimpeached integrity—many of them being Waqidi's contemporaries—have expressed of him. What our Western friends would still think of their favourite authority, I leave to them to judge. I do not at all mean to suggest that everything which Waqidi reports is false. Probably many of his reports are true. But an authority whose integrity has been so gravely impugned, cannot have much respect from us; he will have to be dismissed in cases in which he is alone in reporting anything, more so, in cases in which he is in conflict with other reporters.

Two motives have been assigned for Waqidi's fabrications. Firstly it is thought that he was too imaginative and prided himself on giving the very minute details of incidents. This coupled with his lack of scruples often made him trespass the bounds of truth. Secondly it is said that he was a

favourite in the Court of Baghdad and being untruthful and addicted to lying he did not hesitate to fabricate traditions to provide his masters with religious sanctions for some of their un-Islamic activities. Be that as it may, there is no denying the fact that Waqidi is universally condemned as an inventor of false traditions and as such he cannot be accepted as an authority of any kind.

Among original authorities on biography, the only works, therefore, are those of Ibn Hisham, Ibn S'ad, and Tabari. I do not at all suggest that everything recorded by them is unquestionably true, but only, that they are on the whole reliable, though even they may have occasionally reported wrongly owing to want of proper criticism or some defect in the chain of narrators. But, leaving aside the Quran and the books of Hadith, these are undoubtedly the main sources of the Life of

the Prophet, whatever use we may still make of other works.

#### LATER AUTHORITIES

OTHER works on biography and history, however comprehensive and useful, cannot be treated as original sources of our subject. For, they themselves have been mainly derived from the three works which I have mentioned above. We can, therefore, only quote them for purposes of corroboration or convenience. As for myself, I have made only such use of them in my Life of the Prophet. I have often found it convenient to quote one later authority instead of many earlier ones, but in all such cases I have satisfied myself that the traditions quoted from the later works are to be found in the earlier ones. Still, the later works are of great value. They embody a tremendous amount of industry. In them have been brought together traditions from the original works on Hadith

and History. In many cases they record traditions from works which have since perished. So that—within certain limits of course—they can take the place of earlier but extinct works.

The following, out of these later works, may be mentioned:—

1. *Al-Raud al-Unuf* (الروض الانف), by 'Abdur Rahman b. 'Abdullah al-Suhaili (b. 508, d. 581 A.H.).

A work in two volumes designed as a commentary on Ibn Hisham. A very reliable and authentic work.

2. *Tarikh al-Kamil* (تاریخ الکامل), by Ḥafiz Ibn Athir al-Jazari (b. 555, d. 630 A.H.). A work in twelve volumes mostly derived from Ṭabari, and well edited. The biographical part relating to the Life of the Holy Prophet is contained in two volumes.

3. *Tarikh al-Khamis fi Aḥwal Anfas* (تاریخ الخمیس فی احوال انفس النفیس), by Ḥusain b. Muhammad bin Hasan al-Diyarbakri (d. 966 A.H.), in two volumes.

Contains well arranged matter and is fairly comprehensive.

4. *Insan al-'Uyun fi Sirat al-Amin al-Mamun* (انسان العيون فی سیرة الامین المامون), by 'Ali b. Burhanuddin al-Halabi (b. 975, d. 1044 A.H.). A work in three volumes—popularly known as *Sirat Halabiya*—very comprehensive but rather ill-arranged.

5. *Sharḥ Mawahib al-Ludunniya* (شرح مواهب اللدنییہ), by Muḥammad b. 'Abdul Baqi b. Yusuf al-Zurqani (d. 1122 A.H.). A work in eight big volumes, all devoted to the Life of the Prophet. Comprehensive, reliable and scholarly. Makes use of theological as well as historical traditions. I should have no hesitation in acclaiming it as the most comprehensive and on the whole the most reliable Life of the Holy Prophet in Arabic.

6. *Mu'jam al-Buldan* (معجم البلدان), by Abu 'Abdullah Yaqut b. 'Abdullah al-Ḥamvi (d. 623 A.H.), in eight volumes.

This book is full of detailed and useful information on Geography.

Besides these, we have the following works on the Life of the Prophet:—

- (1) *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafa Naisapuri* (406 A.H.);
- (2) *Sirat Ibn 'Abdulbar* (463 A.H.);
- (3) *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafa Ibn Jauzi* (597 A.H.);
- (4) *Sirat Ibn Abi Tayi* (630 A.H.);
- (5) *Iktifa* (634 A.H.);
- (6) *Sirat Kazruni* (694 A.H.);
- (7) *Sirat Dimyati* (705 A.H.);
- (8) *Sirat Khilaṭi* (708 A.H.);
- (9) *Tarikh Abulfida* (732 A.H.);
- (10) *'Uyun al-Athar* (734 A.H.);
- (11) *Sirat Mughlaṭai* (762 A.H.);
- (12) *Nur al-Nibras Sharḥ 'Uyun al-Athar* (841 A.H.);
- (13) *Kashf al-Litham* (855 A.H.);
- (14) *Mawāhib al-Ludunniya* (923 A.H.), etc.

Some of these have perished and such as have survived, have little value compared with the works I have already mentioned.<sup>1</sup>

1. There are four books indispensable for reference to early Islamic works and their authors, viz., (1) *Kitab al-Fihrist* by Ibn Nadim (كتاب الفهرست لابن نديم), (2) *Kashf al-Zunun 'an Asami al-Kutub wal-Funun*, (كشف الظنون عن اسامي الكتب والفنون) by Mullah Katib Chalpi, (3) *Tadkirat al-Huffaṣ* (تذكرة الحفاظ), by Ḥafiz Shamsuddin al-Dhahabi and (4) *Wafayat al-A'yan* (وفيات الاعيان), by Ibn Khallikan.

These contain accounts of all standard Islamic authors and their works—extinct or extant—on almost every science or art that has ever flourished in Islam. The two last named also give biographical accounts of all great men and women of Islam irrespective of the fact whether they were writers or not. Add to these the books on *Asma al-Rijal* and you will have a reliable reference library so far as the names of early Muslim scholars and their writings are concerned.

## SUMMARY

TO summarise, the sources of the Life of the Holy Prophet and of the early History of Islam are the following :—

- (1) The Holy Quran.
- (2) The Hadith.
- (3) Works on *Tafsir* or exegesis which record the Prophet's own interpretations of the Quran as well as those of the Companions.
- (4) Works on the Life of the Prophet and on early Muslim Wars.

The relative value of these sources is indicated by the order in which they have been put in the above list. By far the most reliable is the Holy Quran, about the authenticity of which there can be no question at all. Its revelation was spread over the twenty-three years of the

Prophet's ministry, and was recorded as it was received. It is the key to the solution of all difficulties connected with the Life of the Prophet and the early History of Islam. Next to the Quran is Hadith, in the collection of which the greatest possible care has been taken but which, nevertheless, cannot have the authority of the Quran, particularly as feeble traditions have also found their way into it. Next to Hadith are those traditions whose primary significance is exegetical. They provide the setting and the environment in which portions of the Quran were revealed, also reports of what the Holy Prophet himself said to enlighten the Companions on the meaning of those portions. But here also a good many feeble traditions have crept in. Last of all come works on the Prophet's life and Muslim history, which are indeed the mainstay of the Prophet's biographer. Unfortunately, however, this is the source most infected

with feeble traditions. The primary concern of the Prophet's biographer is, therefore, to hold fast to the Quran and the Hadith and never lose sight of them; else he will not succeed in getting to the true spirit and the right significance of the Prophet's Life. We may build up a bony skeleton out of material provided by works on biography and history, but the flesh and blood and, above all, the inner soul can come only from the Quran and the Hadith. And these only would tell us how to put the right bone at the right place.